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RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 3548
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 0894
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9357
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 8189
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0344
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 5992
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 3416
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 005307

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TAGS: PK PREL PGOV

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BUSH'S VISIT TO PAKISTAN

ISLAMABAD 00005307 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, DSCG 05-01,
January 2005, Edition 1, Reason: 1.4 (B,D)

¶11. (C) Summary. President Bush's March 3-4 visit to Pakistan inspired a range of opinions on the state of the US-Pakistan relationship. Government officials, such as President Musharraf, PM Aziz, and FM Kasuri expressed satisfaction with the visit and its outcomes, including the launching of a strategic dialogue and progress on counterterrorism and defense cooperation. Opposition parties, who are typically critical of US policy, applauded the President's comments on democracy. As expected, most criticism centered on a familiar sticking point for Pakistan: India. President Musharraf and other GOP officials, however, sought to counter the widely held view that what is good for India must be bad for Pakistan. End Summary.

GOVERNMENT POSITIVE ON US-PAKISTAN RELATIONS...

¶12. (SBU) In public statements and private conversations following President Bush's March visit to Pakistan, GOP officials have expressed satisfaction with the visit and its outcomes. President Musharraf and PM Aziz have repeatedly said that the visit went as they expected, and that it strengthened Pakistan's strategic relationship with the US and institutionalized dialogue on energy, economic relations, and defense cooperation. President Musharraf, in particular, has led the way in trying to give the visit a positive spin. Sitting through an hour-long barrage of negative and pointed questions from eminent newspaper editors, Musharraf insisted that he was pleased that the President overnighted in Pakistan, and that he mentioned the importance of resolving the Kashmir dispute.

...BUT CONCERNED ABOUT THE US-INDIA CIVIL NUCLEAR INITIATIVE

¶13. (C) MFA officials*notably FM Kasuri and Pakistani Ambassador to the US Karamat*were initially positive about the visit, but their favorable comments were subsequently

overshadowed by their criticisms of the US-India civil nuclear deal. The MFA criticized the deal on two (mutually inconsistent) fronts, arguing on the one hand that it would destroy the NPT and on the other that in the interest of regional stability, Pakistan should get a similar deal. On March 16, FM Kasuri told the "Financial Times" that "Once this (deal) goes through, the NPT will be finished. It's not just Iran and North Korea. Brazil, Argentina, and Pakistan will all think differently." (Kasuri subsequently maintained to the Ambassador that his remarks were distorted.) On March 17, the Foreign Ministry issued a press-release saying, "The grant of a waiver as a special case will have serious implications for the security environment in South Asia, as well as for international non-proliferation efforts. The objective of strategic stability in South Asia (would have been better served if the United States had considered a package approach for Pakistan and India)." Continuing on this track, it also stated, "The Agreement...would only encourage India to continue its weapons programme without any constraint. On its part, Pakistan would not accept any discriminatory treatment...Pakistan will neither be oblivious to our security requirements, nor to the needs of our economic development, which demand growth in the energy sector, including civilian nuclear power generation.⁸ Ambassador told PM Aziz that official comment critical of the nuclear deal was helpful to neither Pakistan nor the US. Aziz agreed. There has been no further official word on the issue over the last week or so.

OPPOSITION WELCOMES DEMOCRACY FOCUS

¶4. (U) In the days following President Bush's visit, opposition politicians who routinely criticize US policy towards Pakistan hailed President Bush's statements on democracy. PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto, former Pakistani

ISLAMABAD 00005307 002 OF 002

Ambassador to the US Syeda Abida Hussain, and Jamait-e Islami officials took the President's statement that the 2007 elections should be fair as a very positive sign. Bhutto was particularly effusive in her praise, telling reporters that the President's statement pushing for a democratic future and fair elections reflected the sentiments of the Pakistani people. She also praised the President for assuring Pakistanis that "Washington's commitment to democracy applies to America's allies as well." Jamait-e Islami deputy Liaquat Baloch and other MMA leaders took the President's speech as a sign that Musharraf would have to take off his uniform immediately and hold new elections, because "the US is watching."

"GIVE US SOMETHING JUST AS GOOD"

¶5. (C) Despite the efforts of Pakistani and US officials to de-link the US-Pakistan and US-India relationship, many Pakistani politicians and the ordinary public want equal treatment with India. This theme has emerged repeatedly in a drumbeat of negative editorials and articles, and in private conversations with GOP officials. For example, NDC Commandant LTG Raza Muhammed Khan told A/S Hillen during his recent Pakistan visit that "New Delhi received far more than it deserved" during the President's visit. PML Senator Asif Jatoi complained to Poloff that once India got the landmark civil-nuclear deal, "you needed to give us something big."

¶6. (SBU) Most government officials attempted to stay positive in the face of such media criticism. Musharraf told critics that they were not being rational, saying "it should not bother us what the US does with India, because those relationships should be viewed independently." Others, such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs Additional Secretary (Americas) Shahid Kamal have told US officials that as a result of the "big" deliverables given to India, the Pakistani public now has higher expectations for the US-Pakistan bilateral relationship. He suggested that US assistance in education and increased market access for

Pakistani textiles could help improve public perceptions that the US values its relationship with India more than its relations with Pakistan.

COMMENT

17. (C) President Musharraf and senior leaders understand the significance of the President's visit and appreciate his comments on Kashmir and his willingness to overnight in Islamabad. The fact that most other Pakistanis have a jaundiced view is not surprising, given decades of rivalry with India and a festering ambivalence about relations with the US. We expect popular perceptions will change over time as we begin to put substantive content into the various elements of the composite dialogue. As official US visitors meet with opposition figures in coming months, we will have an opportunity to put to rest any doubts regarding our commitment to democracy in Pakistan. End Comment.

CROCKER